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HOW TO PREPARE FOR A QUALITY AIR FORCE ASSESSMENT

A COMMANDER S GUIDE

BY

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A RESEARCH REPORT SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY

IN

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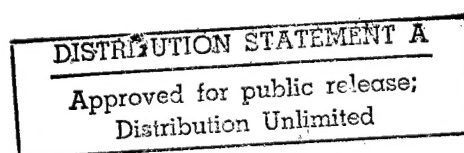
REQUIREMENT

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ABSTRACT

TITLE: How to Prepare for a Quality Air Force Assessment: A Commander's Guide

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How does a commander get a unit prepared for a Quality Air Force Assessment? What are the most important ingredients to ensure productivity and process improvement? How do I juggle all my mission tasks and responsibilities while at the same time develop a course of action to instill quality principles in my organization? Those questions are certainly pertinent in today's military environment where mission responsibilities are on the rise and Quality Air Force programs continue to be refined.

As a commander, I struggled with these issues but found a real link between **mission** and **quality**. The bridge that links these critical issues is **a quality approach** which includes key variables such as leadership, core values, strategic planning, team building, and assessments. As such, I will provide a commander's perspective based on my own experiences on how to prepare for a Quality Air Force Assessment. Preparing for a Quality Air Force Assessment is not for the Inspector General Team. It is for your unit! Principles used in your quality journey in preparation for the assessment will pave the way for quality integration throughout your organization. Further, a quality roadmap leading up to the formal assessment will have a tremendous impact on mission productivity and continuous process improvement.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Lieutenant Colonel John C. Koziol was the squadron commander of the 488th Intelligence Squadron, Royal Air Force Mildenhall, England prior to his selection to attend Air War College. During his period as squadron commander, he was responsible for RC-135 operations in support of both United States European Command and United States Central Command theater of operations. Additionally, he was responsible for integrating three new missions into his squadron to include Electronic Combat Operations; support to Special operations; and Project EAGLE REACH, a mission system that provides near real-time information to theater commanders.

While squadron commander, Lieutenant Colonel Koziol developed Quality Air Force programs in preparation for a Unit Self Assessment and a Quality Air Force Assessment. He became a firm believer in quality principles during this process because they had a dramatic impact on productivity and process improvement. As such, he gleaned lessons learned from his experiences and became interested in sharing his insights with individuals to assist them in their preparations for Quality Air Force assessments.

Lieutenant Colonel Koziol's other assignments include the following: intelligence staff officer positions at Headquarters United States Air Force; commander of a detachment in Berlin, Germany; and a range of intelligence officer positions located in Germany and Greece.

Lieutenant Colonel Koziol has a bachelor's degree in political science from Norwich University, Vermont, and a master's degree in business administration from Troy State

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

In just the past four years, a myriad of studies have been conducted on quality. What is it? How can I apply quality principles in my organization? Which model should I use? How can I fit strategic planning into my compressed, unpredictable schedule? I confronted these questions when I assumed command of an airborne reconnaissance squadron. We all have been fortunate to have held challenging, demanding positions. However, as we progress in our careers, these challenges will become more demanding and will require unwavering attention to one premise--Quality! Therefore, the purpose of this paper is twofold: to provide a commander's perspective on this most important ingredient for success and to provide you a roadmap to assist you in preparing for a Quality Air Force Assessment. My lessons will hopefully help you design a game plan to implement quality initiatives in your organization. However, a foundation to build this game plan must first be established. As such, **Chapter II** of this paper begins with an examination of the most important element required to instill and enhance quality initiatives--leadership. This is the backbone for all quality efforts. It is so critical that the United States Air Force has centered all three components of the Quality Air Force system around it--quality focus, the improvement process, and quality in daily operations. (29:2) In addition to discussing leadership, **Chapter II** will also focus on the importance of core and quality values. Leadership and values interface with each other and are the keys for creating a quality environment. (29:12) Once I establish this leadership foundation, I will then turn to **Chapter III** that will provide my opinion on the most important elements required for strategic planning based on my experience as a squadron commander. In particular, my assessment will focus on the three elements I find to be the backbone for implementing strategic planning in any organization. The first element I will provide perspective on is the need for a vision. "The vision is the foundation upon which the

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organization's mission is built." (23:31) I will then transition into the second element I found crucial to strategic planning--the development of the mission statement. I say "development" because it is a process to ensure all unit members fully understand and commit to their mission. Finally, this chapter will focus on the third element critical to strategic planning--realistic and attainable goals and objectives. It is very important to note there are many strategic planning models you can use in developing your roadmap to success. However, I have chosen the elements of strategic planning I found to be the most beneficial in focusing an organization towards quality. Further, the elements I will discuss in this chapter were the backbone behind assessment preparation. In other words, without this strategic planning foundation, you cannot effectively and efficiently prepare an organization for a Quality Air Force Assessment. Following the strategic planning discussion, **Chapter IV** will focus on the Quality Air Force criteria. This is essential because you cannot perform a quality assessment without a clear understanding of the "rules of engagement." As such, I will provide you my interpretation of these criteria based on my experience with this process. Additionally, I will use the most current information from the Air Force Quality Institute to demonstrate why these criteria are so important in preparing your organization for long-term quality improvement. The bottom line for this chapter is simple: to provide you with some key compass bearings to assist you in focusing on the most important elements for quality process improvement--the key to a successful assessment. Once the Quality Air Force Criteria are outlined, I will turn to **Chapter V** to discuss **team development**. This is a critical function in preparing for a Quality Air Force Assessment. This chapter will focus on team selection, team training, and the importance of team dynamics. Based on my experience in this process, teamwork and educating the team on how to perform an assessment is critical in "getting out of the blocks" fast and on the right course. In fact, it is this step in the management process that, if done correctly, will lead to a smooth and organized Unit Self Assessment which is the topic for **Chapter VI**.

In **Chapter VI**, I will provide a commander's perspective on the Unit Self Assessment. In particular, I will focus attention on the purpose of the Unit Self Assessment and some of the key components of the report. More importantly, I will provide my perspective on the value of the Unit Self Assessment. The Unit Self Assessment is not a square filler. It is a "reading" on where your organization stands in terms of your quality journey. Further, it is the gauge a leader can use to assess the unit's health and its progress in making quality improvements. In essence, it is a leader's blueprint for the future because it will provide leadership and management insight on where they need to focus and where they have made progress. It is the document your Inspector General will use to validate your quality actions during the Quality Air Force Assessment.

Finally, **Chapter VII** will provide my conclusion and observations associated with this topic. It will sum up what I believe the quality process is all about. The Quality Air Force program is here to stay. It is not a reinvention of Management by Objectives. It is a process that can improve productivity as well as enhancing the quality of your people. To set the stage for providing a squadron commander's perspective on quality and the Quality Air Force Assessment process, it is necessary to first examine the nucleus for all quality efforts--leadership. "Leaders, not slogans, turn quality talk into quality action." (5:7)

CHAPTER II

LEADERSHIP AND VALUES

Leadership--A Critical Link to Quality

"So leaders must not overlook what may seem obvious--that leadership, like quality, isn't an event . . . it's a process." (5:7) I must have overlooked the obvious. When I took the reigns of command, I wanted to direct actions, make key decisions, be the focal point for change, and set the stage for all new initiatives--I wanted to have an impact! What is wrong with that? Nothing! There were many times when situations I confronted called for such actions. Let me be the first to say there were even more situations where a different approach paid more beneficial dividends to both squadron personnel and our external customers--the tactical warfighters. This different approach revolved around quality initiatives with leadership providing the compass bearings. Therefore, in this section I will share those leadership "tenets" most useful in developing a quality organizational culture. "The leader's role in nurturing organizational cultures that encourage people to look beyond tradition and to excel is pivotal." (27:11)

Leadership--Getting Your People to Buy-In

The previous quotation sets the stage for why leadership is so important to any quality initiative. Therefore, the first tenet is what I call "leadership buy-in." In other words, leadership commitment to quality. This is critical because unit personnel will want to know immediately where you stand on the Quality Air Force program. For instance, my Quality Awareness branch was the first to get on my calendar following my change of command. They wanted to get my thoughts and opinions on quality--they wanted to be assured that I would continue with the quality improvement process. I was impressed by their drive and enthusiasm, but I know they were looking for direction and a commitment to develop programs leading to full integration of the Quality Air Force system.

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The best way to demonstrate commitment is to be involved with each and every branch of your unit. As such, I made it a point to encourage each work center to review all their key processes with the goal of making improvements. Further, the status quo was a thing of the past. Consequently, each work center was a target of opportunity for improvement. As Ken Myers stated in his article, <u>Value-added Leadership: Build TQM by Reinforcing Your Transparent Advantage</u>, value-added leaders "are involved and involving without being obtrusive. They walk around nudging, assisting, helping, sharing information and building others into the process, helping to create shared commitment. They actively promote teamwork and inspire a sense of shared fate." (21:23) Once you have clearly demonstrated your commitment to work the quality process, the other leadership tenets required for a quality organizational culture must come into play. This includes the tenet of empowerment, or how I like to describe it--getting people involved!

Leadership--The *Power* of Empowerment

During my first unit Quality Council meeting, a member stated, "We have to get our people empowered at all work levels." I paused and said, "What do you mean? They are involved in all aspects of the unit's mission. I see them contributing to all operations and support functions." I was wrong! My blinders were on because the Quality Council was specifically describing the need to get people **involved** in key process reviews to enhance both operations and support functions. For quality to be ingrained in your unit, leadership must allow people to be involved in the process--my second tenet for quality leadership. This means being involved with critical process reviews, Process Action Teams, Tiger Teams, development of goals and objectives and many other avenues of quality integration. This is Value-added Leadership. (21:24) In this sense, you are supporting creativity and challenging your people to look outside the boundaries to make constructive, positive changes. (21:24) The following quote clearly articulates this leadership tenet critical to developing a quality organizational culture: "Encourage your personnel to explore new options instead of settling for the obvious." (20:43) With this

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leadership tenet, you will be able to cultivate an environment that strives on improvement. To build on this framework, a third leadership tenet is a necessity--sound, effective communication.

Leadership--The Need to Communicate Effectively

Why would communication be a key leadership tenet to foster a quality organizational culture? Simple--if you are not communicating your vision, mission, and goals and objectives you will not build teamwork. Through effective communication, you will develop the most important operating style for your organization. (29:16) This most important element is the following: "Creating a working environment that inspires trust, teamwork and pride. Trust and teamwork instill pride and a sense of mission ownership. That creates quality professionals." (29:16) This statement hits the bulls-eye! I saw this first hand when I communicated our vision, mission, and goals and objectives to each and every member of the unit. They felt they had a stake in the outcome and they brought new, fresh ideas to the process. Communication gave them a sense of purpose and gave them an opportunity to participate in the development of these critical strategic planning steps. Consequently, feedback from unit personnel resulted in revisions to the vision and mission statements as well as our goals and objectives.   Also, it resulted in personnel "buy-in." Without "buy-in" you will not develop an organizational quality operating style. Warren Bennis and Burt Nanus in their book, Leaders-Strategies for Taking Charge, clearly state the importance of communication, "Leaders articulate and define what has previously remained implicit or unsaid, then they invent metaphors and models that provide a focus for new attention." (1:39)

Leadership--Getting Your People Trained and Educated

"Leaders must make it clear in their communications they believe in the need to continuously educate the work force and the organization's leadership." (9:11-12) This statement leads to my fourth and final leadership tenet required to create a quality organizational culture. Senior leaders must invest the time and resources to provide

<u>Quality Air Force education</u> to their personnel. As a squadron commander, it was imperative that everyone received at least the three-day Quality Awareness training. Everyone had to "read from the same sheet of music" to fully understand how to implement quality initiatives and to cultivate a quality operating style. Without this framework in education, it would have been impossible to integrate the three elements of the Quality Air Force system--quality focus, the improvement process, and quality in daily operations. (29:2) Therefore, leadership must put education at the forefront.

As you progress towards implementing the three elements of the Quality Air Force system, it will become even more important to invest resources and energy in educating your personnel. This education includes facilitator, team leader, and statistical process control training. I found by investing resources and personnel for this training we were able to smoothly transition into the strategic planning process. Further, this additional training paid major dividends as we prepared for our Unit Self Assessment and our Quality Air Force Assessment As such, one of the most important principles of quality leadership is "continual education and training for all." (26:3) As a senior leader, your emphasis on education is a major element in your efforts to develop a quality working environment. It will lead to "a network of coordination, guidance, and technical support." (26:4) The bottom line for this leadership tenet is: "Training and education for all--Everyone must know the Quality Leadership philosophy, team dynamics, and problem solving tools and techniques." (26:4)

The above section provided a squadron commander's perspective on the leadership tenets required to create an environment dedicated to quality principles. These leadership tenets call for commitment; getting people involved; clear, effective communication; and quality training and education for all personnel. The following quotation says it all if you do not establish this leadership foundation in your unit: "If leaders remain distant from the day-to-day operations of the organization, there is apt to be inadequate emphasis on quality. Strong beliefs dictated from the top die at the top if corresponding support and

reinforcement does not occur." (5:7). Now that the leadership tenets have been discussed, it is time to examine one of the most important roles you have as a leader--determining the **values** your people subscribe to in your organization.

Core Values

Why is it important to identify and understand the values of your organization? Further, why is the understanding of values so important in terms of preparing for a quality assessment? The answer to these questions is the same and the following quotation says it all: "For each organization there is a core set of values and beliefs that determines the organization's survival and success." (27:20) This critical issue could have easily been examined as an element of strategic planning, but I believe it is an essential ingredient of sound leadership. In essence, strong leadership, coupled with the identification of your organization's values, will be the "springboard" to successful strategic planning--the key to preparing for a Quality Air Force Assessment. In my examination of values, it is important to understand the ones outlined by the Air Force Quality Institute and the role you have in defining the values of your own organization. In that regard, I will first briefly discuss the Air Force core values as described by the Air Force Quality Institute.

The Air Force Quality Institute focuses on six key core values--**integrity, courage, competence, tenacity, service, and patriotism.** (29:13-14) In essence, these core values form the foundation of our military and are the keys to the successful accomplishment of our mission. **Integrity** is the bedrock of building trust in any organization. Further, integrity leads to the promotion of ideals and instills professionalism throughout an organization. **Courage** does not simply mean giving your life for your country. In terms of quality, it means making a stand--making decisions that may not be popular with the majority but are in the best interest of the organization in the long run. As such, courage is required in a quality environment to ensure long-term improvement. (29:13) **Competence** means being the best in what you do. Further, it means taking every possible step you can to improve your abilities in your respective job. **Tenacity**, in the context of quality, means not stopping at hurdles but overcoming them so you can get your organization on the right track to foster a quality environment. As the

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Air Force Quality Institute states, it is a core value that "exercises determination and persistence." (29:14) **Service** relates to your support for both internal and external customers. Simply put, it is your role to ensure your people get the best possible support and tools to perform their job and that your external customers get the best products you can provide. Service is a total commitment to quality. Finally, **patriotism** is pride in your country as well as your mission. In terms of quality, it means understanding mission goals to get the job done for our country. (29:14) These six core values are essential for cultivating an organization committed to excellence and continuous process improvement. Moreover, they represent the foundation from which you, as the senior leader, can proceed to identify the **quality values** in your organization. "An organization's values sometimes are organized and codified into the organization, that is, the way the organization approaches its work." (12:14)

Quality Values

"Quality Values that are never properly articulated to employees have as much relevance and power as falling snow in a sealed paperweight on a senior executive's desk." (13:94) As the senior leader, it is your responsibility to take the steps to determine the quality values of your organization. This is a paramount requirement as you proceed to tackle strategic planning. Moreover, identifying these quality values will give you the proper bearings to accurately assess your organization's efforts in implementing quality initiatives. In other words, clear identification of your organization's quality values sets the stage for successful integration of all elements of your game plan for creating a quality environment. "According to management expert Philip Selznick, the formation of an institution is marked by the making of value commitments . . . [and] the institutional leader is primarily an expert in the promotion and protection of values." (27:19) The key words in the previous statement are **the promotion and protection of values**. The approach you take in this area will be critical for successful strategic planning and a validated quality assessment. As such, I will examine the approach my organization took in identifying its

quality values. It proved to be successful and it put the organization on the correct path for cultivating a quality environment. Further, it was one of the most emphasized areas during the Quality Air Force Assessment because the assessment team was charged with the responsibility to validate the process used to identify quality values and the means used to communicate these values to members of the organization.

Identifying and Communicating Quality Values

The Quality Council plays a major role in identifying the quality values of the organization. It plays such a vital role because the Quality Council is composed of all the key managers of your organization. "If the differences in values are not identified, clarified, and understood, there can be little agreement about how the organization's future meets the personal expectations of the individual members of the management group." (12:13) The above statement is a critical one because management must first come to grips with their own quality values. In this regard, we used the **brainstorming and grouping** technique to outline management's quality values. The first step called for each member of the Quality Council to discuss their beliefs concerning the values required for a successful organization. This brainstorming session allowed for open discussions on a variety of issues ranging from personnel development to meeting customer expectations. Once this session was completed, we grouped the values identified into specific categories. These categories were the following: **promoting personnel development, commitment to satisfy customer requirements, empowering our people to make decisions, continuous improvement, and total professionalism and integrity.** As a result of this analysis, we now had management's definition of quality values. Would they match up with the quality values of the entire organization? To answer that question, we had to go out to each and every member of the organization--effective communication was the key element of this effort. "The form in which quality values are communicated says a lot about their importance to an organization." (13:95)

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We used two means to communicate quality values to the members of the organization. First, all members of the Quality Council briefed their respective functional areas on the results of the council's values identification process. Secondly, we developed a quality value survey that allowed each member of the organization to express their own personal beliefs concerning the values needed to cultivate a quality working environment. In essence, management demonstrated it **valued** their inputs--the key to the success of this effort. As a result of their response, we added two quality values to the ones identified by the Quality Council--**commitment to quality and commitment to professional development**. The bottom line of the quality value process is simple--"quality should be a theme woven throughout the organization." (13:95)

Determining the values of your organization is a critical ingredient for the successful implementation of all quality efforts in your organization. Based on my experience, it was a key element in ensuring the organization remained on the right path to quality. Moreover, understanding these values allowed the organization to focus on process improvement and people improvement--keys to a successful program and a fully validated quality assessment. I emphasize values for one simple reason--without them you cannot conduct a thorough strategic planning effort. In essence, the above discussion focused on a values-clarification process. As such, this values-clarification process, coupled with the strategic planning process, represents the implementation of the shared values of an organization. (12:14)

With the leadership foundation established and values examined, the stage is now set for providing a squadron commander's perspective on the most important ingredients for successful strategic planning. However, before I discuss these elements, a short description of strategic planning is in order. "With a strategic quality planning process, organizations can do things right *and* do the right things." (7:37)

CHAPTER III

THE STRATEGIC PLANNING PROCESS

Concept of Strategic Planning

There are virtually hundreds of definitions for strategic planning and as many consultants with varying models on how to implement this critical process. As a squadron commander, understanding the concept of strategic planning was essential to guide the unit towards a quality organizational environment. Therefore, the first question I had to answer for myself was the following: Why should I conduct strategic planning? I needed to answer this question for one simple reason--to be fully committed to this process. At first, I thought strategic planning was something the Pentagon and major command headquarters should be responsible for--setting the direction for the United States Air Force. Why should a squadron be involved in strategic planning? Squadrons have day-to-day operational tasking to be concerned about. However, as I studied this process, I found my "going-in" position about strategic planning was wrong. As the process evolved, the reasons for strategic planning soon became obvious.

The reason for a strategic plan is simple--to provide a framework for the entire unit to focus on mission accomplishment. In simple terms, it is the unit's game plan to fulfill the needs of the organization and the organizations it supports. It is "the process by which the guiding members of an organization envision its future and develop the necessary procedures and operations to achieve that future." (12:3) In relation to my squadron, the strategic plan was a "living-breathing" document. Further, it focused on keeping every member of the unit "tuned-in" to customer satisfaction, productivity, personal and professional growth, unit strengths and weaknesses, and finding the means necessary to meet challenges head-on. "Strategic planning does not deal only with future decisions. Instead, strategic planning is concerned with making decisions today, that will affect the organization and its future." (12:7) Bottom line: your unit's strategic plan should be

thought provoking. It is a people process and, if done successfully, "can improve an organization's efficiency, effectiveness, decision making, teamwork, ownership, and quality." (3:23) So far in this chapter I have described the concept of strategic planning. The stage is now set for providing a squadron commander's perspective on the three most essential elements of strategic planning--**vision, the mission statement, and the unit's goals and objectives**.

Vision--A Key to the Strategic Planning Process

"Developing a strategic plan may sometimes feel like building a raft while treading water." (4:21) This section will provide insight on how to keep that raft afloat and on a steady course. As such, this discussion will focus first on the most important element required for successful strategic planning--**VISION**. "Strategic planning also enables the organization's leaders to unleash the energy of the organization behind a shared vision and a shared belief that the vision can be fulfilled." (12:6) Creating a vision for your unit is the most important first step toward successful strategic planning. "The leader must initiate the action and take the first step by expressing the desire to improve through visioning." (9:5) This quotation clearly puts in context why vision is an integral part of the strategic planning process. In essence, if you do not have a vision, then you do not have any direction. "The vision is the foundation upon which the organization's mission is built." (23:31)

So, what is a vision? I thought a vision was an abstract idea--some long-term futuristic ideal. Moreover, I thought it was an idea we did not have to focus on right away because it was so far off in the future. In both cases I was wrong. The following definition best describes the concept of vision: "To choose a direction, a leader must first have developed a mental image of a possible and desirable future state of the organization. This image, which we call vision, may be as vague as a dream or as precise as a goal or a mission statement. The critical point is that a vision articulates a view of a realistic, credible,

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attractive future for the organization, a condition that is better in some important ways than what now exists. A vision is a target that beckons." (17:50)

As we developed our vision, this definition played a major role in keeping us focused on where we wanted to go and how we were going to get there. Notice I said, "as we developed our vision." In many cases the senior leader, or a group that shares leadership, establishes the vision. But in my case, I used a group technique to develop our squadron's direction for the future. Further, I found that using the talents of my personnel paid major dividends because they added tremendous input to this process. More importantly, unit personnel "bought-into" the process of strategic planning right away. "The vision must be shared; the vision comes alive only when it is shared. The vision must directly involve the followers and empower them." (12: 42-43)

The development of the vision statement sets the stage for the unit's mission statement and its goals and objectives. So it is imperative to get unit personnel involved in the process. "Individuals will not work to achieve a vision if they do not accept it, and people cannot be made to accept a vision through coercion or by simply asking them to come aboard." (17:58) To ensure that did not happen, I started the process of developing the unit's vision statement at the Quality Council. This was a logical step because all key managers were members of the council. We focused on a total "commitment to rethinking and reviewing the organization." (14:1) Consequently, key assumptions associated with our unit surfaced, allowing us to develop a framework for our vision statement. These key assumptions provided an opportunity to look into the future. As a result, we established "compass bearings" on where we wanted the unit to head. More importantly, we focused on the envisioning process--"envisioning concentrates on the end goal (the desired future state), not the means to reach the goal." (12:43)

"If there is a spark of genius in the leadership function . . . it must lie in the ability to assemble . . . a clearly articulated vision of the future that is at once simple, easily understood, clearly desirable, and energizing." (18:1) This quotation articulates the next

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stage of the envisioning process we undertook--the development of the vision statement. The key assumptions process provided the Quality Council with a wide range of areas to focus the vision statement. For example, this process highlighted four critical areas-- training, people, mission execution, and products to support customers. Therefore, our goal was to develop a vision statement that would encompass these critical areas. From this envisioning process, it was clear "the vision should explicitly and implicitly shape the day-to-day activities-and thus the future-of the organization." (23:32)

The goal was to develop a vision statement that was clear, concise and challenging. In essence, we wanted a statement everyone in the unit could identify with. Further, to attain a sense of ownership, we set out to "galvanize attention and action." (17:51) The vision statement that resulted from these efforts was the following: **The best trained and motivated team, getting accurate information to the warfighter on time, every time**. This statement was clear, concise, and attainable for the Quality Council because we developed it. However, there was one major link missing in the process--communicating the vision and receiving feedback from unit personnel. Of all the envisioning processes, this is the most important for the senior leader in the unit. The bottom line is the following: "The tool that provides a leader with the most leverage in inspiring an organization to embrace and move toward a new vision is effective communication." (27:130)

Communication of the vision statement must be done by the senior leader--it cannot be delegated to someone else. The reason is simple: "Well-planned and well executed communication will go a long way in a leader's efforts to illuminate the organization's employees with an understanding of the message of the vision, the need for it, the rightness of it, and the role that they will play in realizing it." (27:130) As a squadron commander, I took this statement as gospel. Consequently, I used several means to communicate the vision statement to unit personnel. These means included cross-talks with six to eight personnel at a time to describe the process we used to develop the vision

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statement. This avenue was very productive in receiving feedback from all unit personnel about the vision. "Leaders who attempt to both develop the desired future state and prescribe the means for reaching that state may find themselves without followers!" (12:44) Further, I briefed the vision and the strategic planning process to all newcomers and reinforced this effort by briefing these areas at each Quality Awareness training session. Again, this provided an opportunity for unit personnel to provide feedback and helped greatly to get personnel buy-in. Finally, I used customer surveys to request feedback from unit personnel on the vision. As a result, unit personnel feedback improved the unit's overall strategic planning process. To reemphasize, communication of the unit's vision statement must come directly from the senior leader. "Communicating the message of the vision is crucial because without effective communication, that message remains hidden and impotent. Leaders must be able to explain the vision in clear terms so that the followers can understand, accept, and commit to that vision." (17:57)

This section provided a squadron commander's perspective on the first and most important element of the strategic planning process--the development of the unit's vision. It is the most important link in the process because it sets the tone for the organization. Further, "it provides purpose and direction, and a basis for unifying the organizational behavior to achieve the desired results." (22:23) "Peter Kreeft, a professor of philosophy at Boston College, says that in order to be a leader you have to lead people to a goal worth having-something that's really good and really there." (27:74) "That essential "something" is the vision." (27:74) Now that the concept of vision has been established, the second critical link in the strategic planning process will be discussed--the requirement for a **mission statement**.

The Mission Statement--An Essential Element of Strategic Planning

It is imperative to develop a mission statement as part of your strategic planning process. As I walked around each work center in my squadron, I asked each section to describe their mission. I was not surprised to receive a different description at each area I

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visited. They were describing their particular piece of the puzzle in the overall unit mission. That was fine--they were proud of their part of the mission. However, as a squadron commander you have to take the lead in defining the overall unit mission so each and every member of the organization fully understands it and strives to accomplish it. Therefore, you have to set the stage to spearhead the mission statement phase of strategic planning. "The primary purpose for having such a mission statement is to bring clarity of focus to members of the organization to give them an understanding of how what they do is tied into a greater purpose." (12:169)

Developing a mission statement may seem fairly simple at the surface. But I can tell you that it will be one of the most difficult tasks to accomplish in your efforts to develop a strategic plan. (12:169) How hard could it be to write down a statement that describes your mission? That was my going in position as we worked this process. It can be difficult because members of your unit will have varying opinions on what your mission really is. Therefore, I used the Quality Council as the forum to develop the mission statement. This was critical because all key managers brought something very important to the table--their individual views concerning our mission. As such, the Quality Council began building the framework for the overall unit mission statement.

As background, our unit had four separate, diversified missions. The task was to develop one statement personnel from each mission entity could relate to. To work this process, I used the tools outlined in the book titled, Applied Strategic Planning. In this book, the authors provide four key questions a unit must answer to successfully begin the process of developing a mission statement. (12:170) The four questions are the following: "1) What function (s) does the organization perform?; 2) For whom does the organization perform this function?; 3) How does the organization go about filling this function?; and, 4) Why does this organization exist?" (12:170-171) From a squadron commander's perspective, investing the time of several Quality Council sessions to answer these questions was the key to developing a clear, concise mission statement for the unit.

These four questions provided the Quality Council with the means to focus on the most pertinent aspects of our mission. In answering the **what** question, we listed all the key missions we were responsible for. From there, we outlined the reasons for these missions--to "define the needs the organization is attempting to fill." (12:171) Consequently, we determined all four missions--airborne reconnaissance, direct support to special operations, U2-R mission integration, and Communications Security all focused on one primary customer requirement--**to provide vital information to support their needs**.

Once this was determined, we continued with the mission formulation phase by answering the **for whom** question. Due to the specialized missions we performed, we developed a customer list and grouped them by mission entity. After a thorough analysis, it was clear we had more than 40 separate customers but they could be grouped into two major categories--**tactical and national decision makers**. From a leadership and management perspective, this part of the mission formulation phase "requires a clear identification of what portion of the total potential customer base an organization considers as its primary market." (23:137-138)

"If the planning team has identified **what** the organization does and **for whom**, it must decide **how** the organization will proceed in achieving these targets." (23:138) As such, our planning efforts now focused on the issue of **how** we would accomplish the missions we were tasked to perform. With so many missions, we decided to go back to the basics. For example, we reviewed the major functions of these missions. Consequently, we determined they all had one central theme--**providing vital information to support decision making**. The result of our analysis was the following: we had to get **the right information to the right people at the right time**.

The final phase of our mission formulation process keyed on the **why** question. By answering this question, we tied all the previous responses together. It was clear we existed for one reason--**to serve as a combat force multiplier** in support of senior level decision makers. As a result of this process, our unit's mission statement evolved to the

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following: **We serve as a combat force multiplier by providing vital information to theater tactical and national decision makers. The right information to the right people at the right time.**

As with the vision statement, we used the same techniques to communicate the mission statement to unit personnel. We wanted to ensure personnel "bought-into" the process and to make sure we "clearly identified the organization's basic business." (12:183) Moreover, this allowed us to further define our organizational philosophy to the people who would perform the mission. (24:97) Finally, I wanted to ensure unit personnel fully understood this was a group process and it was imperative to receive feedback. "Team leaders who give all the right answers to team members are undermining, not protecting, their greatest source of potential power." (10:7)

This section described the second most important element in the strategic planning process--the formulation of the unit's mission statement. Clearly the mission "must strongly reflect the vision." (6:44) Additionally, I provided a formula on how to develop the mission statement based on the tools I used as a squadron commander. A mission statement takes time and patience to develop--it does not happen during one Quality Council session. "However, developing a truly functional mission statement is well worth the time and effort, because the organization then has an enormously useful management tool with long-term positive consequences that brings focus and energy to the organization and its members." (12:192) So far I have discussed the leadership tenets required to produce a quality organization culture and two critical elements of the strategic planning process--vision and mission. It is now time to turn to the third most critical element in the strategic planning process--the development of the unit's goals and objectives.

Strategic Planning--The Need for Goals and Objectives

"A leader who is motivated, skilled, and visionary-but nothing more-will remain simply a motivated, skilled dreamer. Real leaders use their motives, traits, and skills to actualize

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their vision in reality." (17:63) To implement your vision and to remain focused on your mission--develop goals and objectives. Goals and objectives are simply a set of priorities you and your squadron develop to keep the organization on the "center-line." Notice I said, "you and your squadron"--do not develop **goals and objectives in a vacuum**. As a squadron commander, I used all the resources available to me to include the Quality Council, members of the unit, and a process called **capability gap analysis**. (29:28) To ensure our goals and objectives provided direction and focus, it was imperative to determine our strengths and weaknesses.   Additionally, it was essential to identify critical success factors. Critical success factors are the cornerstones for building a successful organization. A capability gap analysis helps pinpoint these success factors. "These are critical issues; they're the basis for near- and long-term goal setting." (29:28)

The following example will demonstrate how the capability gap analysis process can assist you in developing clear goals and objectives for your unit. Through brainstorming and identifying key processes, we were able to define our critical success factors. These critical success factors were the following: **emphasis on people, training, marketing, customer focus, reliable mission systems, sufficient resources, the proper work force to meet tasking, and communications**. Additionally, the same process was used to determine our strengths and weaknesses. As such, our strengths were the following: **a highly educated work force, loyalty, dedication, flexibility, and people dedicated to personal and professional development**.   The weaknesses identified by this process were **communication and information flow, training, and customer support**. Based on this process, we analyzed these results to develop the following goal and its associated objectives: **Goal 1: Cultivate an environment that promotes excellence. Objectives: A. Encourage professional development; B. Ensure training programs meet the needs of our people and mission; C. Expand recognition programs to reward teamwork; and D. Be proactive in getting resources to improve working and living environments**.

This goal incorporates three critical success factors: **emphasis on people, training, and sufficient resources**; two strengths: **a highly educated work force and people dedicated to personal and professional development**; and focuses on resolving one significant weakness: **training**. Remember, "creating challenge through goal-setting is an indispensable means for implementing an organizational agenda and an organizational vision." (17:78) That is why, from a squadron commander's perspective, establishing sound goals and objectives is the third major element in the strategic planning process. "Goal-setting determines specific criteria of performance in order to encourage and direct performance to that level." (17:80) Moreover, meaningful and attainable goals and objectives will keep your people motivated to accomplish the mission. As such, "they provide generality and stability and set guidelines for action." (22:24) Further, goals and objectives must continually evolve. They need to be reviewed periodically to ensure they remain current with your mission and your strategic plan. (12:121) "A leader who has developed a vision and wants to ensure that it becomes reality must also be committed to the process that is necessary to make the vision reality-in other words, committed to the *action* of leading to the vision, which is a separate commitment from the belief in what the vision represents." (27:96) This *action* is the leader's commitment to develop the goals and objectives to bring the vision into reality.

So far I have provided a commander's perspective on the critical elements associated with the quality process. These essential ingredients are **leadership, core and quality values, and the strategic planning process**. As such, they are the "bricks" that form the foundation for a quality environment and a successful Quality Air Force Assessment. Now it is time to examine the actual

criteria used to conduct a quality assessment. In this regard, Chapter IV will describe these

criteria using a variety of sources. Further, I will put these criteria in context based on my May 1994 Quality Air Force Assessment. The bottom line is simple: "The Quality Air

Force Criteria are the framework for improving overall organization operational performance." (30:1)

CHAPTER IV

QUALITY AIR FORCE CRITERIA

Introduction to Quality Air Force Criteria

As you begin your preparation for your Quality Air Force Assessment, it is critically important to have a clear understanding of the criteria that will be used to assess your organization. Based on my experience with this process, understanding the criteria was the key to accurately documenting process improvement and developing a Unit Self Assessment. Further, understanding the purpose of a Quality Air Force Assessment and effectively communicating the purpose to members of the organization were essential elements for ensuring a smooth, concentrated effort in preparing the assessment.

The efforts you make to prepare for the Quality Air Force Assessment set the stage for continuous process improvement. It is fueled by your role as the senior leader and your organization's initiatives to step out smartly to conduct strategic planning. Additionally, the criteria used by the assessment team will assist you in developing programs to improve the key processes identified by your Quality Council. Therefore, in my opinion, the Quality Air Force Criteria serve two purposes. First, they provide you a set of building blocks to use to accurately assess your quality efforts in every aspect of your organization--ranging from senior leadership to how well your organization serves its customers. Secondly, they "offer a well-defined framework to help raise performance standards and expectations, and help in planning, training, and assessment." (29:7) Therefore, understanding the criteria will ensure you get off on the right track and will keep you focused on continuous process improvement. In this regard, this chapter will provide a

macro examination of the seven Quality Air Force Criteria. As such, this examination of the criteria will provide you a perspective on the assessment categories used to conduct the Quality Air Force Assessment. In essence, you will have to cultivate these criteria to promote and instill a quality environment in your organization--the key to a successful Quality Air

Force Assessment. Moreover, this examination will clearly demonstrate why these criteria are so important in the Quality Air Force Assessment process--"to assess and improve the unit's mission capability and performance." (19:657) As such, the Quality Air Force Assessment process is often referred to as a **Quality System**. (11:51) Therefore, the examination of the criteria begins "where most experts say a quality system must begin, with leadership." (11:51)

Category 1: Leadership

"If the leader's fingerprints aren't on the quality strategy, the propensity for failure is great." (11:57) This quotation clearly articulates the importance of senior leadership in promoting quality in an organization. As such, the leadership category of the Quality Air Force Criteria will assess leadership involvement "in creating and sustaining a Quality Air Force culture." (30:1) This category encompasses a wide range of leadership issues to include senior executive leadership, management for quality, and public responsibility and corporate citizenship. As such, the key to your success in this category is dependent on your personal involvement in all aspects of the quality programs in your organization. (13:89)

In terms of senior executive leadership, the Quality Air Force Assessment team will assess how you steer your organization to adopt quality initiatives. Moreover, the

assessment team will examine the steps you take to develop an atmosphere of cooperation and teamwork in promoting quality ideals in the organization. "A company cannot convince its customers, suppliers, or employees that it is committed to continuous quality improvement unless its senior executives participate in the quality improvement process." (11:61) The above statement applies to all Air Force organizations as well. Therefore, the impact you have on setting the stage for establishing a quality culture in your organization will be a major part of the assessment process. Moreover, the assessment team will examine your commitment to leading the Quality Council; your role in providing quality education and training; programs developed to communicate quality throughout the organization; and "how middle-level managers and supervisors have been integrated into the quality process." (13:89) For example, all functional managers established their own branch Quality Council to implement programs initiated by the squadron's Quality Council. As a result, quality programs were refined to meet the specific requirements associated with that particular branch. This demonstrated to the assessment team total commitment at all levels to develop a quality culture throughout the organization.

"Personal involvement can also mean giving and getting education." (13:91) This is a major area the assessment team will concentrate on. For example, they will review your process to conduct initial quality training and the steps senior leadership takes to provide more advanced quality training such as facilitator and statistical process control training. Based on my experience, your personal involvement in the initial training of your people will have a tremendous impact on "buy-in" and commitment to quality. For example, I briefed every training session on the unit's strategic plan and how we developed the unit's goals and objectives. This effort allowed for feedback and it demonstrated commitment to

quality. Further, the Quality Air Force Assessment team recognized it as a key strength in promoting quality ideals throughout the organization. This category does not only concentrate on the role of the most senior leader in the organization. It also focuses on the roles of all leaders in the organization. As such, the assessment team will closely examine **management for quality**.

In Chapter II, I discussed the importance of leadership and the identification of values for cultivating a quality environment. As such, the assessment team will examine management for quality in terms of "the senior leaders' efforts to promote Quality Air Force values and focus the organization on satisfying its customers." (30:1) This is a critical area because the Quality Air Force Assessment team will review "the richness of the corporate values, and the system in place to measure how well these values have been accepted by the employees." (13:89) This was the topic of Chapter II, but the role you and your senior leaders take in promoting these values will be a key part of the assessment process. Based on my experience, effective communication and the means used to communicate these values will be assessed by the Quality Air Force Assessment Team. "Like senior-executive leadership, a robust set of quality values belongs at the beginning of the process of creating a quality-focused organization." (13:94) Further, how well you support your customers is a key element of this category. This includes both internal and external customers. For example, I tasked each functional manager to develop a customer identification plan. From there, they developed a management program to improve customer interaction and feedback. As a result, we refined our processes and produced a better product for our customers. Again, continuous process improvement was the key to this effort and it was a major function assessed by the team. Most of what I have outlined

in this category deals with actions performed within the organization. However, this assessment category also focuses on senior leadership in terms of **public responsibility and corporate citizenship**.

"Public Responsibility and Corporate Citizenship deals with public issues such as environmental protection, health, safety, ethical conduct, and how these are integrated into the organization's quality approach." (30:1) In this area, the assessment team will review both approach and results. For example, we conducted an internal survey to determine health and safety concerns. As a result, we put formal procedures in place for safety risk identification and to track solutions to these discrepancies. Additionally, this survey brought to light a health issue concerning jet fuel fumes entering the logistics facility. A bioenvironmental team assessed the problem and plans were developed to resolve this concern. These are only a few examples, but they demonstrate some of the issues related to this category. Further, you will be assessed on the role you take in the community. This could range from your involvement with the base quality program to briefing your quality efforts to a corporation. Briefing your quality initiatives to a corporation could have a significant positive impact on your efforts to create a quality environment. Civilian corporations have been involved with the quality criteria for several years. As a result, you could tap into their experiences and "benchmark" against some of their programs to improve your own organization.

As you can see, the leadership category is very broad and it provides you with a tremendous opportunity to develop programs to cultivate a top-notch quality environment. The main point to remember is the following: your role as a leader in the quality movement and your ability to get people involved in the process are the keys to success in

this category. Additionally, the assessment team will not only focus on you! They will also concentrate on the effectiveness of your staff to promote and instill quality in the organization. The bottom line is the following: the Quality Air Force Assessment team will be reviewing areas we have always been charged with--commitment to quality, professionalism, integrity, and "creating and sustaining a Quality Air Force culture." (29:8) As the senior leader in your organization, you have the responsibility for improving operational performance. In this regard, the effective use of data can be a powerful tool for leaders in assessing mission performance. As such, the next category of the Air Force Quality criteria "examines the scope, validity, and analysis of data used to improve operational performance"--**Category 2: Information and Analysis**. (29:8)

Category 2: Information and Analysis

"The Information and Analysis category examines the scope, validity, analysis, management, and use of data and information to drive quality excellence and improve competitive performance." (13:103) The assessment team is not looking for quick results in this category. They will specifically review the processes your organization used to select the data to be analyzed and how this data was used to make long-term process improvements. As such, this particular category takes a long time to mature because several steps must be completed before you can effectively perform the proper measurements required for process improvement. In the case of my squadron's quality journey, we did not focus on this category until we completed a lot of ground work first. Remember, one of the areas the assessment team will examine is the approach your organization takes to conduct information and analysis. In the previous chapters, I discussed the importance of identifying quality values and the need to conduct strategic

planning to outline your unit's goals and objectives. Based on my experience with this process, knowing your quality values and having clear, concise goals and objectives are the keys for establishing the foundation for this category. In essence, your collection of data and subsequent analysis of this information should focus on your progress in meeting these values, goals and objectives. "Some call it management by fact, as opposed to management by intuition, management by wishful thinking, or management by blind luck." (11:71)

"Without systematic data collection, companies simply cannot know how their processes are performing, what progress has been made, what needs improving, or what the future holds." (13:103) The above quote is the essence of what the Quality Air Force Assessment team will review. Again, the **approach** you take to reach this stage will be critical in the assessment process. However, how you **deploy** your program for information and analysis will be just as important. Therefore, a few examples are in order to demonstrate this approach and deploy process. For example, the discussion of strategic planning demonstrated how to develop goals and objectives. With these goals and objectives identified, the category of Information and Analysis calls for a **systematic** approach to measure your success in meeting these goals and objectives. Further, this **systematic** approach calls for "adequacy of data, information, and analysis" to support continuous process improvement as these goals and objectives mature. (13:103) A case in point is my squadron's **Goal 1: Continuously improve the 488th Intelligence Squadron s capability to support customers.** To satisfy this goal, four objectives were identified: **(a) Determine customers; (b) Determine customer needs; (c) Create feedback processes to ensure products and services meet customer needs; and (d)**

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Based on feedback, refine processes to ensure customer satisfaction. How do you measure the success in satisfying this goal and its corresponding objectives? It is through the process of manage by fact. As such, you continually evaluate your progress and validate the data being analyzed. (13:104) Further, you use this validated data to make informed decisions to continuously improve your processes to satisfy these goals and objectives. (13:104) In other words, this category of Information and Analysis is an ongoing process--it is a continuous loop that requires accurate inputs to develop a sound process.

Going back to Goal 1, we made several process improvements as a result of correct data being collected and validated. The key words in the above sentence are **correct** and **validated**. For example, based on feedback from internal customers, coupled with data analysis from three separate post mission summaries, a serious mission deficiency was discovered that impacted on our ability to satisfy our external customers. Once this data was fully analyzed and validated, a major software deficiency was discovered which impacted the entire RC-135 fleet. As a result of this analysis, a quick reaction software team was deployed to the unit to validate our findings and within one week the software program was revised. It would have taken at least six months to revise the software if the unit had not collected the right data and validated it properly. The bottom line is simple: we used data from **Objectives (c) and (d)** to refine the key processes to successfully meet **Goal 1--improve our capability to support customers**. The lesson is simple: the assessment team will examine your efforts in determining how you select and validate data.

While assessing this category, the Quality Air Force Assessment team will examine your efforts in **benchmarking**. "Benchmarking is the process of understanding your performance, comparing it against the performance of best-in-class companies, learning how they perform better, and using that information to improve. The last two steps in this definition make benchmarking a major contributor to quality improvement." (11:75) Again, the focus will be on your unit's ability to focus on collecting the correct data to make process improvements in your organization. For example, we were having problems with the Enlisted Performance Report (EPR) accuracy and timeliness trends in the unit. The unit's Orderly Room was the **process owner** for this responsibility so they decided to benchmark against the unit with the best statistics in the Third Air Force. As a result of their benchmarking, the entire EPR process was revised and our squadron tabulated the best timeliness and accuracy rates for 18 consecutive months--100 percent! "Benchmarking is a powerful tool because it promotes quantum improvements in processes and because it motivates people. Working the same process day after day, tinkering with improvements suggested by the same team members, it is natural for new ideas to dry up. Xerox describes it as building a box around ourselves. When you benchmark others, you cut out windows in the box." (11:75)

The above macro view of the Information and Analysis category keys on the need for examining the "scope, validity, and analysis of data used to improve operational performance." (29:8) It is a process that requires patience and continuous revision. Further, it requires some detailed foundation work first by identifying your organization's quality values and goals and objectives. Once this foundation is in place, you will have the proper framework to collect the data to support process improvement. Frederick W.

Smith, the President and Chief Executive Officer of the Federal Express Corporation says it best, "The point is this, the ability to mathematically measure the quality of our service is fundamental to improving it." (28:98) In addition to effectively measuring quality, the category of Information and Analysis "forces every division, department, group, and individual to align all activities toward common goals." (28:98) As such, the next category will focus on the means of defining goals and objectives--**strategic quality planning**.

Category 3: Strategic Quality Planning

As discussed in Chapter III, the strategic planning process is a major function associated with creating a quality environment in an organization. Therefore, the Quality Air Force Assessment team will expend a major portion of its time examining the process used in developing the strategic plan and the end product of your planning efforts. As such, it is very important to understand the phrase *strategic planning* before you start the process. "It is somewhat deceptive, since this category encompasses more than the external environment. It also asks that you examine exactly how your goals and plans--your "tactical" objectives are formed and deployed throughout your company [organization]." (13:119) Consequently, the strategic planning process includes your game plan for the planning function, the detailed steps used to focus your planning efforts, and the programs you develop to communicate your strategic plan to members of the unit. (30:3) Further, the strategic planning process includes your end product and the measuring sticks used to assess your progress in meeting your goals and objectives. In short, the Quality Air Force Assessment team will examine all these key areas.

In terms of the planning process, ensure all strategic planning actions conducted by the Quality Council are documented. Documentation of the following functions is crucial for a successful assessment: **identification of strengths and weakness; results of the capability gap analysis; the process used to develop your vision and mission statements; identification of key processes; identification of both internal and external customers and their respective needs; and the development of goals and objectives**.

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Your assessment team will examine the approach you and your organization took to complete these critical issues associated with strategic planning. Moreover, they will spend a lot of time reviewing your goals and objectives. Not to see if you selected the right ones for your organization, but to determine if they are "clearly linked and mutually reinforcing." (13:132) For example, Goal 2 called for improving our mission effectiveness by improving the flow of communications with internal and external customers **(Goal 2: Objective A)**. As such, the unit's Communications and Computer branch developed a computer architecture for the entire unit and the squadron programmed resources to make it a reality. This demonstrated linkage and a commitment to expend resources to support this goal and objective--key areas that will be reviewed by the assessment team.

Another key assessment area in the planning function will be **communication**--a critical ingredient for successful deployment. "Communication and deployment must be done with great care. Your strategic plan is too important to convey informally at a company [organization] function. How you communicate the plan talks a lot about the seriousness with which you yourself regard it." (13:131) For example, the Quality Council developed a detailed briefing that covered the unit's vision, mission, key assumptions, critical success factors, and goals and objectives. This briefing was presented during daily Total Quality crosstalk sessions with unit personnel. Further, this briefing was provided to each branch chief for dissemination within each section, ensuring uniformity of deployment throughout the unit.

As mentioned earlier, the assessment team will also examine your product as a result of your strategic planning efforts. (30:3) In this regard, ensure your strategic plan takes into

account key assumptions concerning your operational mission. This will lead to refined goals and objectives to meet new mission requirements based on analyzing key assumptions. The following example will illustrate this concept. In 1992, the 488th Intelligence Squadron had one mission--RC-135 missions in support of two theater commanders. By 1994, the squadron added three new missions. Prior to taking on these three new missions, the Quality Council conducted several key assumption sessions to determine requirements to support these missions. As a result, goals and objectives were established to ensure a smooth transition. Further, we interfaced with our external customers to ensure we satisfied their needs. The bottom line is the following: the assessment team will examine "goals established to prepare the organization for anticipated changes in the operational or business environment." (30:3)

To recap, your Quality Air Force Assessment team will review both the process and the product of your strategic planning efforts. The key is documentation, communication, linkage between goals and objectives, and the effectiveness of the planning process. (28:115) Based on my experience, it takes time and patience to conduct successful strategic planning. Therefore, plan your efforts accordingly and **make time** for this important element for cultivating a quality environment. Moreover, do not be satisfied with your first strategic plan because it is a "living" document that requires constant review and updating. "Plans are not perfect. Because customer requirements and market conditions change rapidly, your goals, and the strategies supporting them, must be reviewed on a regular basis." (13:131) As such, the assessment team will examine the process you have in place to ensure regular reviews of the strategic plan. Finally, strategic quality planning plays a vital role in developing your people into professional, competent

individuals. In this regard, the Quality Air Force Assessment team will review how your unit supports personnel development by assessing the **Human Resource Development and Management** category.

Category 4: Human Resource Development and Management

In describing the previous three categories, it is apparent that the Quality Air Force Criteria interrelate with each other and the Human Resource Development and Management category is no exception. As such, the assessment team will examine how your organization's "various human source goals and plans relate to the overall quality initiatives outlined in the previous category, **Strategic Quality Planning**." (13:133-134) Therefore, the key to a successful assessment in this category is linkage of your goals and objectives to the most important resource in your organization--people.

For example, my squadron focused Goal 3 and its associated objectives on our internal customers--all unit personnel. The following describes this goal and its respective objectives: **Goal 3--To Cultivate an environment that promotes excellence. . . . Objectives--(a) Encourage professional development; (b) Ensure training programs meet the needs of our people and mission; (c) Expand recognition to reward teamwork; and (d) Be proactive in getting resources to improve working and living environments**. This goal and its objectives encompass several key areas related to the assessment--"involvement (participation) in quality improvement efforts, education and training, recognition and performance measurement, and morale and well-being." (13:137) In fact, these areas focus on the "four basic evaluation dimensions to human-resource utilization." (13:137) Therefore, identifying specific goals and objectives to enhance human resource development will have a significant impact on your organization's process improvement efforts and your assessment.. "High quality companies treat their human resource as a resource, not a commodity." (11:96)

It is important to emphasize that the assessment team will examine the linkage between your goals and objectives and your human resource efforts. Examining Goal 3, Objective B will demonstrate this point. During the strategic planning process, training was identified as an area requiring total restructure to **cultivate an environment that promotes excellence**. The Quality Council did not identify this barrier in a vacuum. In fact, unit personnel played a major role in bringing this issue to the forefront. The Quality Council requested input from unit personnel using an internal customer survey and it became clear that training needed a complete overhaul. The important point in this example of linkage is the following: the problem was identified by involving unit personnel across the board. Further, unit members participated in the development of the new and improved training program. The bottom line is the following: your "efforts to build and maintain an environment for quality excellence conducive to full participation and personnel and organizational growth" will be assessed. (11:97)

The process of implementing sound human resource and management programs takes commitment and sound planning. As such, the assessment team will examine the approach your organization takes to get personnel involved in the process. "Employee involvement is a major buzz phrase of our times. But how does one get beyond the slogan to practical reality?" (13:139) This is a major focus of the assessment team and there are several initiatives you can take to get your people involved in the process. For example, we empowered work centers to review key processes with the goal of streamlining all of them to improve efficiency. Further, we chartered Process Action Teams composed of unit members from various branches to focus on ways to improve areas that impact mission and people. Additionally, we established "mentoring" programs that gave our young

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enlisted force an opportunity to participate in key branch level management situations. Moreover, we developed a new suggestion program targeted at quality and process improvement. The program was highly successful because it empowered people to look at ways to improve processes. I highlighted these examples for one reason--to demonstrate the power of personnel involvement. Your organization will prosper as a result of this involvement and your assessment team will recognize it immediately. Remember the following as you develop programs to support this category: "Two of the most common, and potentially the most powerful, mechanisms for involving employees are teams and suggestion systems." (13:137)

The Human Resource Development and Management category cuts across all elements of the Quality Air Force Criteria. However, leadership and effective strategic planning will be the keys to making a significant impact on human resource development. As such, the assessment team will closely examine this interaction because it is totally dependent on a systematic approach. "A systematic approach to using your human resource begins by aligning human resource plans with your company's [organization's] quality goals, strategies, and plans." (11:97) Further, the assessment team will take a close look at programs developed to "deliver high levels of operational performance." (29:9) In this regard, attention is turned to **Category 5--Management of Process Quality**.

Category 5: Management of Process Quality

This key category will be assessed based on how well your organization functions in "preventing mistakes" vice "correcting mistakes." (13:152) In other words, the assessment team will examine your organization's processes to improve operational performance. Further, there will be a close linkage between this category and the category

of Strategic Quality Planning. As such, your organization will be assessed on the processes "selected through the organization's strategy formulation as outlined in the category *Strategic Quality Planning*." (13:151) Based on my experience, your strategic planning process, coupled with your goals and objectives, will be the keys to developing processes **across all functional areas** to improve operational performance.

"Management of Process Quality is mostly about the prevention of errors. It provides a foundation for building quality into production by eliminating errors at the source." (13:152) For example, my squadron designed a process to develop a new, more reliable software preparation process for RC-135 missions. The process that existed prior to this design approach did not verify that the software duplication hardware had in fact generated an error-free mission load. As a result, our support to external customers was hampered due to software failures causing early mission aborts. The new design approach restructured the entire process for preparing software for RC-135 missions. As a result of this new approach, the unit enjoyed a 99.7 percent mission effectiveness rate over an 18 month period--a significant improvement in operational performance. Additionally, this effort demonstrated a close link between process improvement and the unit's strategic quality planning function. The process developed had a major impact in meeting **Goals 2 and 3 of our strategic plan--it improved support to customers and it improved mission effectiveness**.

Another key area the assessment team will examine is your organization's efforts in analyzing key processes to support the needs of your people. (30:5) Again, there is a close linkage between this area and your strategic planning efforts. For example, the logistics supply function was hampered by antiquated hardware and software systems

associated with tracking ground and airborne spare parts inventories. As a result of this problem, the inventory process caused delays in getting critical mission equipment repaired and logisticians became frustrated with the system. The problem was resolved by empowering logisticians to develop new software procedures and a resource decision to purchase state-of-the-art computer systems to enhance operational performance. In this example, people, processes, and resources were integrated to resolve a serious shortfall in the unit. This linkage is essential to improving operational performance and it is an area the assessment team will examine.

The main point to remember for this assessment category is "continuous improvement depends upon process control." (28:158) Through your strategic planning efforts you will identify areas that require improvement. In the Management of Process Quality area you will make improvements to processes to enhance productivity and performance. The linkage between the two is crucial in order to develop a quality work environment. Further, it will be the key to a successful assessment in this category. Remember, "the first place that people look internally for quality is in the quality of the processes used to produce a product or service." (11:110) Now it is time to turn to the next step in the Quality Air Force Assessment process. In the Management of Process Quality area you review key processes and make changes to improve operational performance. However, the process does not end here. You need to design mechanisms to demonstrate that these changes have improved operational performance. As such, the next step in the assessment process "calls for reporting quality levels and improvements for key products and services--things that truly matter to the customer and the organization." (30:5) To accurately

assess this area, the Quality Air Force Assessment team will focus on **Category 6--**

Quality and Operational Results.

Category 6: Quality and Operational Results

As my squadron transitioned into tracking quality and operational results, the Quality Council empowered each branch in the unit to identify indicators that would demonstrate how well they accomplished key processes. The plan centered on tracking information, identifying trends, and conducting long-term analysis in order to continually improve processes. The key phrase in the previous sentence is **long-term analysis**. Category 6 takes a long time to mature because you have to make an effort to identify the **right** information to analyze. The assessment team will examine the types of data your organization selected for analysis and how you applied this data collection to process improvement. Based on my experience, it is imperative to closely align data collected to your goals and objectives. This will provide you tools to accurately assess your progress in meeting these goals and objectives. Further, alignment of data collection to goals and objectives will ensure the linkage required for improving operational results--a key to a successful Quality Air Force Assessment.

As described earlier, a key component of this category is trend analysis. As such, just do not focus on internal trends. Use benchmarking to conduct trend analysis with other organizations. This will provide the organization with a solid baseline to make necessary adjustments to improve operational performance. For example, the Logistics branch collected statistics on Airborne Maintenance Technician (AMT) evaluations. The branch collected data to determine if the new AMT training program was successful. This new training program was developed in support of Goal 3 outlined in the unit's strategic plan. Analysis of the data demonstrated a downward trend in evaluation pass rates. Moreover, benchmarking with another RC-135 unit indicated they had a much higher pass rate.

Based on this information, the Logistics branch made additional changes to training and reversed the downward trend. Collecting the **right data** and **benchmarking** with another similar unit provided the necessary information to reverse the trend. Another key area the assessment team will evaluate concerns "quality, productivity, and effectiveness levels of support units and staff functions." (30:6) In this regard, the unit's Quality Council focused on internal support functions and how they interfaced with the operational mission. For example, we collected data to determine the effectiveness of our Mobility and Readiness branch in responding to deployments in support of OPERATION SOUTHERNWATCH. The data collected clearly demonstrated changes were required in mobility line processing and equipment issue--the process took too long to complete. Based on the analysis of timeliness trends and processing procedures, the entire system was restructured. As a result, mobility processing time was reduced by 50 percent and the entire process was redirected to support the customer--the deployed crew members. Moreover, it demonstrated a linkage between Strategic Quality Planning and Quality and Operational Results. The collection of the **right data** resulted in **changes** to **support Goal 2--Improving Mission Effectiveness**. Further, it focused on people--our most important resource.

"Category 6 is unusual because it focuses solely on results." (11:120) "So--if processes are everything and you have assessed and improved processes throughout your organization--why does Baldrige [Quality Air Force Assessment Team] care about your results?" (13:167) The answer is simple--results tell you where you stand in relation to your process improvement efforts. "Your results are your bottom line." (13:168) Therefore, it is important for the success of your unit to measure results. Category 6 is

specifically designed to do just that. Based on my experience with this category, it provided me the means to target shortfalls and to make course corrections to enhance operational performance. I used it as a tool--not something we had to do just to pass the "litmus test" for the assessment team. By fully **deploying** this category throughout your organization, you will be "laying the groundwork for continuous improvement." (13:168) Additionally, it will provide a framework to use to assess your organization's support to customers--the subject of **Category 7, Customer Focus and Satisfaction**.

Category 7: Customer Focus and Satisfaction

"The most salient characteristic of companies [organizations] that do well in this category is that they are relentless in collecting data on customers." (13: 176) That statement is the key to success in scoring well in this category. More importantly, it is the key to developing strategies and quality initiatives that will keep your unit focused on operational performance. Based on my experience with assessments, your first step must be identifying your customers. During the strategic planning process, the development of the mission statement plays a major role in this area. "The mission statement of the unit helps identify the organization's customers." (29:10) In the case of my squadron, the mission statement was the following: **We serve as a combat force multiplier by providing vital information to theater tactical and national decision makers. The right information to the right people at the right time**. As such, we identified theater tactical commanders and national decision makers as our customers. With these broad categories identified, the Quality Council developed a customer identification plan to specifically list all customers in each of these two areas. That is very important for a

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successful assessment. The Quality Air Force Assessment team will look at the process your organization used to develop your customer listing.

Following the identification of your customers, the Quality Council must take the lead in establishing strategies to determine customer requirements. "The first, most vital step on the road to customer satisfaction is to identify customer requirements." (13:178) Again, this will be a major area the assessment team will examine. A successful strategy for determining customer requirements is to develop a customer contact plan. In the case of my squadron, the Quality Council chartered each branch to develop a customer contact plan. These plans contained the following: a complete listing of customers, timelines for contacting customers, results of the contact sessions, requirements outlined by customers, and a timetable for periodic interaction with customers. As a result of the program, the organization established customer-supplier relationships. Further, requirements were established by the customers--not the supplier. That is very important because the assessment team will evaluate the process your organization used to determine requirements. The bottom line is the following: the customer knows best--the supplier should not tell the customer what they need.

Another key area the assessment team will evaluate is how your organization "evaluates and improves its processes for determining customer requirements." (13:179) The customer contact plan was the first step my squadron took to meet this requirement. However, as the program matured, new means for determining requirements surfaced. For example, the unit developed formal programs to survey customers on a quarterly basis. These surveys requested customer information on requirements. Additionally, squadron personnel associated with production and reporting visited theater and national

consumers on a quarterly basis to discuss requirements. Further, operations management personnel deployed on Navy ships to discuss requirements to ensure we satisfied their mission tasking. All these examples demonstrate customer relationship management and customer requirements definition--keys to the assessment process.

The assessment team will also evaluate how your organization "projects into the future what products, services, and special features customers will require." (13:178) Customer contacts play a vital role in this area because it can provide insight to increased mission tasking. For example, our Major Command adjusted squadron manpower to support additional requirements associated with OPERATIONS PROVIDE PROMISE and DENY FLIGHT. In addition to projecting future requirements, the assessment team will evaluate the process used to determine customer satisfaction. In this area, the assessment team will review programs developed to measure customer satisfaction. "Customer focus and satisfaction must become the culmination of all your quality improvement efforts." (13:175) In this area, customer satisfaction surveys, statistics on mission tasking, reporting accuracy rates, and mission effectiveness rates were some of the tools used to assess customer satisfaction. "A company [organization] must look to its customers first in determining what it needs to do and last in evaluating its success at doing it." (28:192)

Finally, the assessment team will evaluate how your organization integrates leadership, information management, strategic planning, and management of process quality to support efforts to meet the needs of customers. In essence, Category 7 is the main reason your unit exists. "It demands constant sensitivity to emerging customer and market requirements, and measurements of the factors that drive customer satisfaction." (11:132) This major function cannot be fully embedded in your organization without all the other

categories working in concert with each other. The bottom line for the Air Force Quality Criteria is the following: it is designed to make your organization the best it can be . . . for your people . . . for your mission . . . and for your customers. Understanding the categories described in this chapter is critical to facilitating a sound assessment program. Additionally, your efforts in building a sound team to conduct your Unit Self Assessment is equally important. This team will be responsible for assessing all areas associated with the Quality Air Force Criteria. As such, Chapter 6 will provide information on the team approach to the assessment process. Further, it will provide information concerning team dynamics--for this select cadre will be responsible for documenting your quality progress in preparation for the Quality Air Force assessment.

CHAPTER V

THE TEAM

Introduction to the Team Concept

During the course of this paper, I have described leadership tenets, quality values, strategic planning, and the Quality Air Force Criteria. In all areas, these essential ingredients for building a quality culture rely on people. In fact, the areas discussed thus far are the building blocks for integrating quality into your organization. The focus now turns to the actual assessment process. As with the other elements of quality, this process depends on people--not working as individuals but as a team. Therefore, this chapter will examine the team concept for conducting a Unit Self Assessment. As the senior leader in your organization, selecting the team and giving them the tools to perform this important function are critical to a smooth and productive assessment. Based on my experience with this process, establishing a team composed of people across all functional areas in the organization was the key to success. As this chapter will demonstrate, the team approach is the only viable way to get an accurate "pulse" reading of your organization. Further, the team process allows for constant feedback and flow of ideas--both critical elements associated with conducting an assessment. The reason for having a team is simple: "rarely does a single person have enough knowledge or experience to understand everything that goes on in a process." (25:C2-7) As such, your Quality Council and your stewardship will be the keys to selecting the team. However, prior to selecting your team, the Quality Council must take into consideration some critical issues that could impact on team

selection. Therefore, I will describe some of these key issues to set the stage for the discussion of the team approach for the Unit Self Assessment.

Areas to Examine Prior to Selecting the Team

"The synergy that comes from people working together productively on an important project is usually enough to sustain the enthusiasm and support, even through difficult times." (25:C2-9) However, as the senior leader, you have an important role to play to ensure team synergy throughout the assessment process. Before selecting the team, the Quality Council spent considerable time reviewing issues that could impact on the team. For example, the squadron was enduring more than a 50 percent Temporary Duty rate at the time of the assessment. Therefore, the Quality Council had to consider mission tasking and deployment schedules in determining team composition. In fact, the Air Force Quality Institute lists mission tasking and future schedules as two major issues to consider when selecting teams for the assessment. (32:U3-2) Further, you have to consider personnel changes in the selection process. Due to the squadron's heavy deployment rate, this was a major concern for the Quality Council. Finally, the Quality Council had to consider the impact on the squadron's primary mission as a result of pulling several members of the unit from their functional areas to perform the assessment. This is a major consideration because you may get resistance from management. Further, you will initially experience resistance from team members because of conflicts between their primary job responsibilities and the assessment. However, you can deal with both issues through strong leadership and effective communication. In my case, I specifically used the guidance provided by the Air Force Quality Institute. As such, the Quality Council consistently emphasized the importance of the Unit Self Assessment and how it "supports

the organization's mission." (32:U3:3) "Therefore team members should consider their participation as a priority responsibility, not an intrusion on their real jobs. The project is now part of the member's real job." (25:C3-15) Examining potential issues that could become barriers to team selection and the assessment process are critical to getting off on the right track. Once you resolve these issues, the stage is set for team selection.

Selecting Your Unit Self Assessment Team

Selecting the team is a process in and of itself. In fact, the Quality Council dedicated several quality sessions to this process. First, the Quality Council reviewed all seven categories to fully understand the assessment criteria. This process gave the Quality Council insight on the types of people required for each team. Further, it provided the Quality Council an appreciation of the task at hand. At first, I thought the assessment process would take two to three weeks. After thorough analysis, it became clear it would be a four to six month process. Secondly, the Quality Council analyzed the types of personalities and technical expertise required for each category. Again, we used the guidance provided by the Air Force Quality Institute to provide us a baseline to start from. As such, the Quality Council assessed education, interests, experience, and personality traits essential for a successful team effort. (32:U3-11) Thirdly, after fully analyzing these four essential elements for team selection, the Quality Council began the process of selecting team members for each of the seven categories. Based on the squadron's mission and deployment rate, the Quality Council decided to select a primary and secondary team member for each category. This would allow for continuity since team members would not be exempt from deployments. Further, each team member would have to be a volunteer. In essence, the Quality Council selected people it wanted on each

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team. However, to have a successful team, members have to want to participate--not be coerced to participate. Fourthly, the Quality Council briefed each prospective team member on the assessment process. This allowed for two-way feedback between the Quality Council and each potential team member. Further, it gave each prospective team member an opportunity to be candid about being on the team. Remember, interest and personality traits play into team selection. (32:U3-11) As such, many potential team members volunteered to be part of the assessment process. Others who showed lack of interest were taken off the list. Again, this process takes time and patience. If your team does not start off on a positive note, your entire assessment process will be in jeopardy. Based on my experience, do not become discouraged by the team selection process. It is worth the time required to put an effective team together. Finally, the Quality Council decided to survey the entire unit for volunteers. This opened the door for people who may not have been considered by the Quality Council but who wanted to be part of this effort. Again, the Quality Council interviewed each volunteer and discussed the assessment process in detail. Bottom line: I used a phased approach to build each category team--the Quality Council selection process and the unit-wide volunteer system. Combining these two approaches, the Quality Council built a strong team for each of the seven categories. With this foundation established, the Quality Council moved to the next step--selecting team leaders and facilitators.

Critical Players--Team Leaders and Facilitators

The Quality Council focused on selecting top-notch personnel to be team leaders and facilitators. In essence, these two key players in the assessment process play a vital role in keeping teams focused. First, the team leader must be a respected member of the unit.

Secondly, the team leader must have communication skills, a "can-do-spirit", organizational skills, and a desire to make the unit the best it can be. (32:U3-11) Finally, a team leader must know how to manage because he or she will be responsible for "managing the team, calling and facilitating meetings, handling or assigning administrative details, orchestrating all team activities, and overseeing preparation for reports and presentations." (25:C3-8) Therefore, it is critical for the Quality Council to select the **right team leader for each of the seven categories**.

During the team leader selection process, the Quality Council must review people to be facilitators. "Select facilitators internally from among your most promising talent." (2:141) Based on my experience, the Quality Council selected the most curious and most quality driven people in the unit. They are critical to the success of the team assessment process. "They provide advice, guidance, support and additional or remedial instruction for teams. They are instrumental in keeping teams on track and, thereby, minimize wasted time and maximize team results." (2:140) It is not essential to have seven facilitators for the assessment process--one for each category. In fact, my squadron selected three people to be facilitators. This worked extremely well because all three facilitators were aware of the progress of each team. As a result, each facilitator interacted with all seven teams. Further, this interaction enhanced productivity, fostered communication, and ensured linkage of criteria between all teams. With the team selected, the Quality Council must make a commitment to the team assessment process. As such, senior leadership and the Quality Council must give team members the tools, resources, and support necessary for this significant quality undertaking.

Supporting the Team

Now you have your team selected and they are ready to proceed with the assessment. Wrong? As the senior leader, you have the direct responsibility for ensuring they have the means to conduct this assessment. "What training is needed? Budget? Equipment? Which in-house or external specialists will be needed to advise the team?" (25:C3:17) These are all important questions that must be addressed by you and your Quality Council. However, the most important area to concentrate support is **training**.

"I can't stress this enough. Team members must be trained, trained, and then retrained. Training cannot be just a few days in the classroom. Instead, it must be a continuous learning process. This is accomplished by bringing people back for refresher training or advanced training. Also, further training can be accomplished by the leader, facilitator, or visiting trainers during selected team meetings." (2:72) During team preparation, my squadron used all of these training avenues. As we prepared ourselves for the assessment, we quickly found that we needed assistance from outside sources to prepare team leaders and members for this new way of assessing a unit's implementation of quality principles. We integrated and deployed the Total Quality Awareness course throughout the unit, but this was not enough to prepare the teams for the task at hand. Therefore, the Quality Council decided to expend the time and resources to get Unit Self Assessment workshop training and instruction on the assessment process from trained personnel from two other overseas locations. This training, coupled with the three-day Total Quality Awareness and Team Leader/Facilitator courses, gave us the foundation to begin the Unit Self Assessment. Further, the Quality Council sent one member of the unit back to the United Stets for Statistical Process Control training. In turn, this unit member

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trained each team on metrics and competitive comparison techniques--both critical to successfully assessing improvements in operational performance.

In addition to resources and training, teams need sincere and genuine support from senior leadership--to include all management levels. "An occasional supportive visit to the team is greatly appreciated, and if a manager is called in by a team to help during a meeting, he or she should rush to the opportunity." (2:72) The reason for this support is clear-- "it must be strongly supported by management or it will self-destruct." (2:71) Senior leadership and Quality Council support are essential to the success of this team assessment approach. In addition to the above, support means patience with the process and freedom to work the process. "Teams also need time to complete their project; and we shouldn't expect results in three weeks . . . Support the teams, but don't look over their shoulders and stare at the calendar." (2:73)

This chapter examined the team concept associated with the assessment process. Clearly team selection is a critical aspect of this process. Further, the role of senior leadership and the Quality Council in supporting the team is vitally important to ensure a smooth, successful assessment. Each category team has an immense responsibility. First, they have to become experts on the Quality Air Force Criteria--not an easy task. Secondly, they have to develop a solid and professional bonding with each of the other teams. Finally, they have to formally assess the organization's quality journey. This includes the formal assessment, supporting documentation, and validating the assessment with senior leadership. As such, they have the responsibility for assessing "customer satisfaction, benchmark comparisons, customer responsiveness, cycle time, environmental quality, and continuous improvement." (31:11) The foundation is established--Quality Air

Force Criteria is deployed throughout the unit and all seven teams have been selected and trained. Now the stage is set to discuss the Unit Self Assessment-- "a vehicle to carry any organization along the road to continuos improvement." (31:13)

CHAPTER VI

THE UNIT SELF ASSESSMENT

Introduction to the Unit Self Assessment

"Assessments are an important part of the continuous quality improvement process."

(13:45) By using the Quality Air Force Criteria, the assessment process "can be used as a

precision diagnostics tool to identify weaknesses in the organization, providing focus for

improvement and goal-setting activities." (13:45) Moreover, the assessment process will

clearly identify your strengths. As such, these strengths can be used to rectify

improvement opportunities identified by your assessment team. Your Unit Self

Assessment is the cornerstone for gauging your progress in cultivating a quality culture in

your organization. Further, it is the tool for senior leadership, management, and unit

members at all levels to use to make continuous operational improvements. It is not a

square filler to satisfy the requirements levied by your Quality Air Force Assessment team.

I say this for one reason--to fully benefit from the assessment, your organization must

understand that it is designed to improve the organization at all levels. This includes the

following: leadership, strategic planning, customer satisfaction, and key processes.

Additionally, the Unit Self Assessment is based on management by fact. (32:U1-8) As

such, your team will examine your long-range planning efforts; how you integrate quality

throughout your organization; how you identify processes requiring improvement; how

you manage changes to processes; and how you instill teamwork. (32:U1-8) Senior

leadership and management can only benefit from the Unit Self Assessment. "The self-

assessment process works because it helps senior management to recognize the scope of

its quality system and confront its strengths and weaknesses." (11:142) As such, the data collected during the process is the key to identifying these strengths and opportunities for improvement.

Unit Self Assessment Data Collection

"Although self-assessment sounds like a job for diligent bean counters, a nit-picky kind of project that "big picture" people avoid, it actually illuminates the big picture like no other assessment tool." (11:136) The data your team collects will **illuminate** the big picture and it will provide you the compass bearings to make progress. As such, the assessment team will be gathering data on all seven Quality Air Force Criteria to examine **approach, deployment, and results**. (32:U4-23) "Approach constitutes—**How. . . .** Deployment constitutes--**To What Extent. . . .** Results constitute--**With What Outcome**." (32:U4-23) During the examination of approach and deployment, the team will collect data concentrating on "evidence and facts; systematic and planned approaches; themes and governing philosophies; and flow charts." (32:U4-23) For example, each branch manager flow charted all key processes associated with his or her functional area. Based on the analysis of these flow charts, managers made adjustments to key processes to improve operational performance. In essence, each branch manager had a **before and after** snapshot of each key process--demonstrating quality improvement. The above example deals with **approach**--it demonstrates **how** a process was changed to make improvements in the organization.

In terms of deployment, you can expect the strategic planning process to be closely examined. For example, the Quality Council establishes goals and objectives. However, **to what extent** have these goals been deployed throughout the unit. In the case of my

squadron, each branch manager integrated these goals and objectives into their functional areas. In essence, the unit's main goals and objectives were used as a catalyst for improvements in each functional area. This is only one example of deployment data the assessment team will collect. Finally, teams will collect data to examine **results** of your quality efforts. In other words, proof that process change improved operational performance. As such, the team will collect statistical data that measures trends.

Knowing that approach, deployment, and results data have to be collected is only the first step in the process. To be successful in data collection, your team must understand the different means available for collecting information. For example, teams can use interviews, surveys, statistical analysis, and other means to collect data. The key is to have team meetings to outline the scope of data collection. Additionally, team leaders for each category must discuss data collection with the other teams. The reason for the interface is the following: data collected may be shared between teams to accurately assess the entire approach, deploy, results process. Further, teams must meet to determine exactly what they are searching for, where they are going to find it, and what they are going to do with it. (32:U4-26) In other words, teams must prepare in advance to collect data. (32:U4-24) It is a very time consuming portion of the assessment--knowing the game plan in advance will ensure a smooth transition into data collection. Once the data is collected against each criteria, it is time for the team to prepare the actual Unit Self Assessment report.

Preparing the Unit Self Assessment Report

The preparation of the Unit Self Assessment report requires close coordination among all seven category teams. In other words, each team cannot write their respective

category assessment in the **blind**. As discussed throughout this research paper, linkage between categories is critical to building a successful quality environment. Your teams will be responsible for ensuring this linkage takes place. For example, areas examined in the Senior Leadership category could have an impact on the Strategic Quality Planning segment of the assessment. Further, programs developed in the category of Management of Process Quality could have a direct impact on other categories. Therefore, it is imperative to have complete team integrity and cross-category team involvement throughout the assessment process. Moreover, the report plays a vital role for senior management and the entire unit. Consequently, it provides the unit with a baseline to work from; it provides a roadmap for continuous improvement; it "fuels" the strategic planning process; and it is the product submitted to the Quality Air Force Assessment team for validation. (32:U4-34) Now it is time to score the assessment using the Quality Air Force Criteria.

Scoring the Report

"Preparing a concise description of your organization's complete quality practices, scoring it yourself, and developing your own set of strengths and improvement opportunities can be rewarding--albeit humbling--experience." (13:142) The scoring of the report is an area that requires education. It is a much different approach from what you have experienced with compliance Inspector General reports. As with the actual assessment process, the system for scoring the criteria is based on approach, deployment, and results. (30:29) Further, there are different point values for items contained in the Quality Air Force Criteria. (32:U5-5) "For example, Item 1.1 is worth 45 point and Item 7.5 is worth 85 points; therefore, because of weighting, individual points are not worth the

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same value in Item 1.1 as they would be in Item 7.5. As a result, Baldrige has established the range scale so that approach, deployment, and results could all be rated with equal weight." (32:U5-5)

The scoring process takes place at the consensus session with all team members. Based on my experience, each team leader briefs the results of their respective assessment category. The team leader specifically discusses approach, deployment and results. Further, the team leader outlines strengths and opportunities for improvement. This process is the same for all seven categories. Following this informal briefing by the category team leader, leaders of the other teams have an opportunity to discuss results and to ask questions. Additionally, senior leadership and management have an opportunity to discuss each assessment item before the scoring takes place. This allows management to clarify issues or provide additional information not outlined in the formal report. Finally, scoring is on a percentage basis. In the case of our assessment, the team selected the range of 0 percent to 100 percent. For example, an organization could score between 40 percent to 60 percent in the approach and deployment evaluation dimensions if it demonstrates "a sound, systematic approach responsive to the primary purpose of the item." (30:30) However, a unit could score 0 percent in the result evaluation dimension if the unit has "no data reported or anecdotal data only" for the item being assessed (30:30) The bottom line is this: the scoring system is fair and it allows for unit input.

The Unit Self Assessment--A Useful Tool

The Unit Self Assessment is a valuable tool for senior leadership and the entire unit. "The improvement opportunities, or weaknesses feed directly into Strategic Quality Planning, a process which is examined in Category 3 of the application." (13:46) As such,

the Unit Self Assessment "provides a framework for an organization's strategic quality planning." (32:U6-2) Additionally, the Unit Self Assessment "helps educate senior leadership and others on what needs to be included in a Quality Air Force organization." (32:U6-2) In this regard, it provides a solid foundation to work from as you develop initiatives to enhance quality throughout your organization.

In addition to the above, the Unit Self Assessment is a tool to share ideas. For example, my Quality Integration office reviewed other assessments to glean ideas that could have an impact on our quality efforts. In turn, these ideas were forwarded to functional managers for more in-depth analysis. As such, the Unit Self Assessment "promotes sharing of good, effective approaches within and between organizations." (32:U6-3) Finally, use your Unit Self Assessment to focus on change--change for the sake of process improvement. "The degree to which it is improved depends on the degree to which management is committed to quality." (11: 153) Your support in keep it a "living" document will have a tremendous impact on your people--it will rally the entire organization to embrace quality. In the words of Secretary of the Air Force Dr. Sheila E. Widnall, "The essence of Quality Air Force is improvement. The use of metrics--and the application of simple measurement tools--are essential so that true improvement can be seen and built upon." (16:1)

CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this paper provided me an opportunity to share with you my experiences as a commander in implementing Quality Air Force programs. By focusing my attention on Quality, I keyed on two purposes for the paper. First, to give you a commander's perspective on the most important ingredients required for cultivating and sustaining a sound, productive quality environment. Secondly, to provide you a roadmap to help you prepare for your Quality Air Force Assessment. In regard to my first purpose, I focused on the main building blocks essential for making **quality a reality** in any organization. As such, I examined leadership and the need for clearly defined values. In terms of leadership, I described the important role senior leadership plays in getting people to support quality initiatives--the "buy-in" process. Further, I emphasized the need for leadership to foster empowerment, communication, and quality training and education throughout an organization. These leadership tenets establish the foundation required for inspiring quality programs. By setting this foundation, it is clear that "the direction-setting aspect of leadership does not produce plans; it creates vision and strategies." (15:36)

In addition to the leadership foundation, determining values and incorporating them in every quality initiative will lead to continuous improvement and empowerment throughout your organization. As such, I examined the role you have in determining the quality values of your organization. Further, I described the Air Force core values and how they relate to building a quality environment. Additionally, I keyed on the need for an organization to have its own set of quality values. By establishing your own set of quality

values, your organization will step out smartly to embrace initiatives to improve operational performance. "If values are quality-oriented, actions which improve quality will follow." (13:94)

After I completed building the foundation for quality, I transitioned to the second purpose of my paper--providing you with a game plan to prepare your organization for a Quality Air Force Assessment. I began this effort by examining the strategic planning process. As such, I focused attention on three elements I found to be the cornerstones for implementing the strategic planning process--vision, the mission statement, and realistic and attainable goals and objectives. By incorporating these three critical elements in your quality efforts, it is my opinion you will pave a clear road for a sound, realistic strategic plan for your organization. "There is no magic formula for implementing quality initiatives and the strategic planning process." (8:3) However, I used the Air Force Quality Institute's Strategic Planning Model as a framework for my discussion of this topic. Moreover, I used it extensively during the strategic planning process in my organization-- it works! "A major benefit of strategic planning is to help an organization see the big picture . . . it will be better able to understand the need for and to make changes . . . rather than to continue to sit in the pan of boiling water and try inappropriately to adapt." (22:119)

After examining the strategic planning process, I then focused on the "mechanics" for conducting the Unit Self Assessment. This included discussions on the Quality Air Force Criteria, the team process, and the key elements associated with the Unit Self Assessment. Understanding the Quality Air Force Criteria will keep your entire organization focused on the Unit Self Assessment process. Moreover, it will ensure a smooth effort along the way.

Many organizations attempt to conduct an assessment without fully understanding the rules of engagement. Based on my experience, make the effort to understand the rules. It will lead to a smooth, rewarding experience for your organization. Additionally, the team concept for conducting the Unit Self Assessment is a tremendous way to get people involved in the quality process. By selecting team members with the right mix of personalities and experience, you will be on your way to building a top-notch quality organization. Finally, use the actual Unit Self Assessment report as a tool to make adjustments to your strategic planning efforts and to improve key processes. In preparing for my Quality Air Force Assessment, the Unit Self Assessment report provided me the road map to follow to focus on continuous improvement--the main goal of the Quality Air Force program. "A quality-focused organization recognizes the need to improve and wisely adapts to meet changing demands." (29:1)

Finally, I hope my examination of the quality process will help you prepare for your Quality Air Force assessment. Based on my experience with the assessment process, it convinced me that it can only make a unit more productive and customer oriented. Moreover, use it as a tool to cultivate a quality environment throughout your organization. By doing so, you will find that your role as a commander will be the most rewarding and gratifying experience in your entire career. "Leaders are people who understand that without vision, there is no leadership; without honesty, there is no communication; without communication and shared values, there is no performance; and without the confidence to reach out and try new things, there is no risk taking or long-term success." (27:viii)

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